

NOTE ON THE COLORATION AND TAXONOMICAL STATUS OF THE BEAR (*URSUS ARCTOS* L.) IN BULGARIA

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The question of the subspecific status of the bear (*Ursus arctos* L.) in Bulgaria has so far been examined perfunctorily, in spite of the fact that from the point of view of geographical variability of the species the Balkan population, owing to its location is of particular interest. The only work dealing with the question (П у с к о в, М а р к о в, 1974) concludes, on the basis of the examination and comparison of a small number of skulls, that the bear in Bulgaria belongs to the nominate subspecies. This view supports the sufficiently justified opinion, according to which, regardless of the variations in form only one subspecies inhabits Europe — *U. a. arctos* L., 1758 (Р о с о ц к, 1932; Е l l e r m a n & M o r r i s o n - S c o t t, 1951; Г е п т н е р et al., 1967).

However, certain morphological features of bears in Bulgaria, together with the geographical situation of the Balkan population give ground to consider that the question of the formation of this population is not so simple. The study of the taxonomic status of the Bear was hampered both by the limited possibility of collecting and comparing skulls and skins of the species, and its considerable variability, in particular as far as coloration is concerned (C o u t u r i e r, 1954). That within one and the same bear population it is possible to come across both dark and light coloration (as is the case with the European subspecies) is well known (Г е п т н е р et al., 1967). Nevertheless coloration reflects geographical variability and to this day remains one of the principal criteria of the subspecific taxonomy of this carnivore species.

The European subspecies (*U. a. arctos*) is characterized above all with a dark-brownish coloration, by various shades, regardless of the existence of various light individual (not rare for example in the Pyrenees), which are rusty-yellowish, yellowish-brown and sandy brown. Special attention to the coloration of the bear in Bulgaria and its variation appears in Г ъ н ч е в (1990). The author draws attention to the great variety of colouring of bears inhabiting one and the same region. (The Caucasuses provide a parallel in that respect — Г е п т н е р et al., 1967; Т и х о н о в, 1987.) What is striking in Gunchev's paper is the existence of specimens with a very light coloration. Other sources also refer to Bulgarian bears with light colouration (П о д г о р о в, 1942). Such bears, representing an extreme form of coloration for the European form, (like the Pyrenean bear) are comparatively frequent in Bulgaria. They are characterized by golden-yellow colour of the guard hairs of the skin. This colour is almost evenly spread all over the body including the area of the abdomen. The head, which with bears as a rule is the first to receive a lighter coloration, is particularly light yellow. The distal parts of the limbs, which with the dark bears are almost black, can be comparatively darker — light brown-rufous-yellowish. A darker yellow-brown spot may be seen at the shoulder. The fluffy hairs are darker — creamy-beige, however much lighter than the brown fluffy

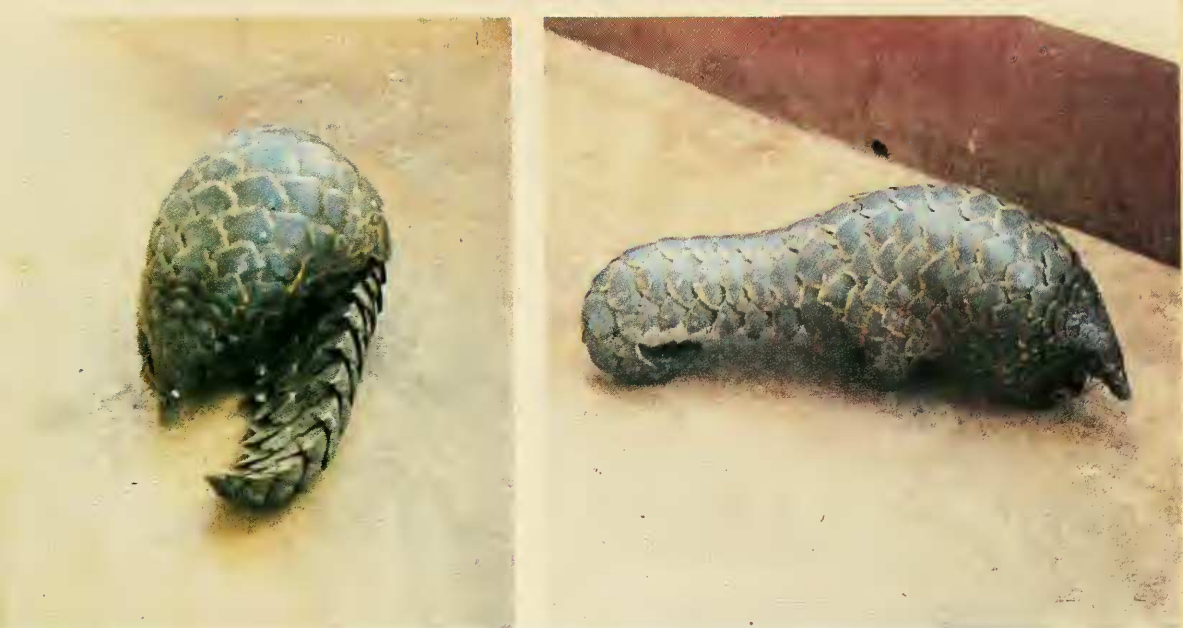


Fig. 1. Cape Ground Pangoline (*Manis temmincki* Smuts) — locality: near the village of Mazeze, Cabo Delgado (North Mozambique)

To N. Spassov's article "On the presence and specific position of pangolins (Gen. *Manis* L.: Pholidota) in North Mozambique"

To N. Spassov's article "Note on the coloration and taxonomical status of the bear (*Ursus arctos* L.) in Bulgaria"



Fig. 1. Light type (gold-yellowish) coloration of ♂ adult female bear (Sofia Zoo; photo V. Hazan)

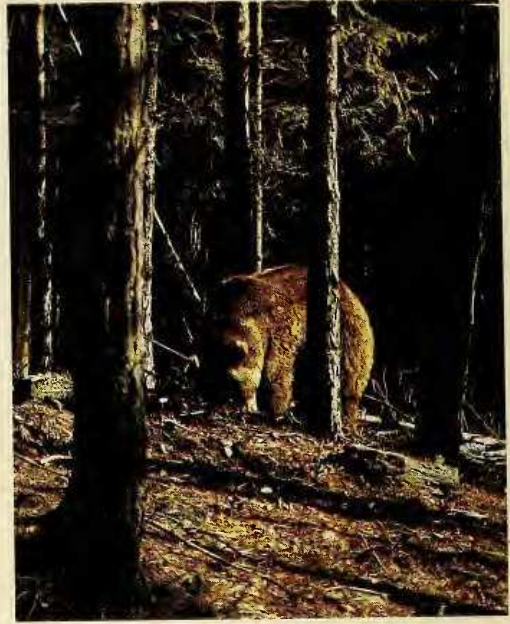


Fig. 2. Light type (gold-yellowish) coloration of 4-1 year old female bear from Verila Mountains (Sofia Zoo; photo V. Hazan)
Fig. 3. A bear in natural biotope from the Middle Balkan Mts' (photo R. Gunchev)



Fig. 4. Dark type coloration. Carpathian adult male (Sofia Zoo)